

**Destruction of Nestling Birds by Reptiles.**—During the course of four seasons among the birds of the Morawa district I have been greatly surprised by the high incidence of nesting "casualties." Some nests have been disturbed before their completion, some have disappeared before the eggs were hatched out, but by far the greatest number were plundered when they contained nestlings. Nests built fairly low were most frequently disturbed and the Crested Bell-bird (*Oreoica gutturalis*) a common victim.

My first deductions on examining such despoiled nesting sites pointed to the domestic cat gone wild, but the following incident, supplemented by the greater frequency of casualties among birds nesting in the much warmer late season, indicate that in many cases the culprit may be a species of *Varanus*.

On October 10, 1950, a very warm day, I set up my camera at 1.45 p.m. beside the nest of a pair of Black Honeyeaters (*Myzomela nigra*). The tripod had been in position for some time and the parents very soon returned to the nest. My intention was to allow the birds about half an hour to settle down, when the sunlight would be favourably dispersed through a section of overhanging foliage. I stretched out under the shade of a low bush about 50 yards away and had fallen into a doze with the binoculars in one hand and the release thread held loosely in the other. Sudden cries of alarm from both parent birds together caused me to sit



A *Varanus gouldii* in the act of withdrawing after swallowing nestling Black Honeyeaters.

upright and focus the glasses on the nest. I could see something moving about among the branches and leaves, and, suspecting a snake, ran directly towards the nest. The intruder disappeared so swiftly into the tangled hatching of grass and debris under the bush that I was unable to identify it, but my anxious examination of the nest revealed that three young birds had been taken. Subsequent adjustment of the camera indicated that at some time during the surprise the shutter had been released. When the negative was developed the identity of the attacker was revealed—the head of a *Varanus* stood in plain view in the accidentally-exposed photograph. The species was identified by Mr. L. Glauret as *Varanus gouldii* (Gray).

—S. R. WHITE, Government School, Morawa.

**Extension of Range of Migrant Orchid.**—*Monadenia micrantha*, a South African orchid, was first recorded in this State from Young's Siding in 1944. At that time it was thought to be a newly-discovered species native to Australia. When W. H. Nicholls toured the South-west in 1946 in search of Western Australian species for his monumental work on Australian orchids he found *Monadenia micrantha* growing in abundance in the Albany area. His study of the living plants convinced him of its true identity. The localities he listed in that year were "on the main road between Upper King and Albany, also at the foot of an ironstone ridge a few miles west of Upper King River district, and in the vicinity of Cuthbert Siding." Nicholls returned to Western Australia in 1948 (a dry year) for further study of Western Australian orchids, but on that occasion failed to discover a single specimen of *Monadenia*.

Under these circumstances I was very interested in January of this year (1952) to find very many dead plants of the previous year's growth along the Marine Drive at Albany. Rev. W. Atkins reports the first appearance of this orchid in 1951 at Mt. Barker along the railway line. So it is evident that it will survive the vagaries of our seasons and is also extending its range along the roads and railways from its point of introduction (presumed to be Albany).

What factor is responsible for this spread is difficult to prove. Perhaps the plant favours the scraped or disturbed earth surface such as is found along roads and railways. Perhaps the air currents made by passing cars or trains suck up the minute seeds with the dust and deposit them on the bodyworks from where they are jolted off either by bumpy roads or the rough shunting of trains. If this be so here is a modern method of seed dispersal unplanned by Nature. That man's present-day methods of transport are being exploited by plants is well known to farmers, who find Double Gees in the car tyres and Guildford Grass flourishing in the virgin bush in eakes of mud dropped off wheels.

—(Mrs.) RICA ERICKSON, Bolgart.